Knowing UV Index Called Key Step In Personal Skin Cancer Prevention

Research Shows Public Unaware of UV Index Precautions; Increased UV Index Media Promotion Urged

Alexandria, VA (June 8, 2006) -- Despite an increasing record number of skin cancer cases, largely caused by UV radiation exposure from the sun, the general public fails to understand the importance of following the recommended protective steps for various UV Index levels, according to new national research conducted by the Sun Safety Alliance and released today as part of the second annual Sun Safety Awareness Week (June 5-9).

This year an estimated 1.2 million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed, more than all new cases of lung, breast, colon and prostrate cancer combined. An estimated 10,000 people die annually from skin cancer. At these rates, more than 26 people die each day, an average of one person per hour.

“Most people are unaware of the fact that skin cancer can be a deadly killer,” said Phil Schneider, Executive Director of the non-profit Sun Safety Alliance.

While it’s a proven fact that overexposure to the sun’s ultraviolet radiation is a primary cause of skin cancer, there are many steps people can take to minimize their risk and still enjoy outdoor activities. “Knowing the proper precautions for the different UV Index levels is one of the best and easiest steps leading to self-protection against skin cancer,” said Schneider.

The new research findings released today by the Sun Safety Alliance conclude there is a serious lack of awareness and understanding among the general public on how to use the UV Index in planning outdoor activities.

The SSA also announced plans to form a task force of representatives of newspaper, television, radio, cable, and internet news organizations, as well as national recreational organizations to develop mechanisms to increase utilization of UV Index information and its dissemination to the public.

The ozone layer shields the earth from harmful UV radiation. Ozone depletion, as well as seasonal weather variations, elevation and location, cause different amounts of UV radiation exposure.

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The Sun Safety Alliance is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization
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The UV Index, jointly developed by the EPA and the National Weather Service, predicts the next day's ultraviolet radiation levels on a scale of 1-11+, with recommended protective actions for different levels (see sidebar story). The UV Index scale ranges from 2 or less: low; 3-5:moderate; 6-7: high; 8-10: very high; and 11+ extreme.

At the extreme level of 11+, only 18% of respondents indicated they felt it important to wear sunscreen, to wear sunglasses (16%), wear hats (12%), seek shade (10%), or stay out of the sun (12%).

Three out of four indicated they had not altered planned activities as a result of a high UV index for the day. Of those who did alter their plans, 22% postponed them to later in the day, 20% selected another activity, and 8% postponed it to another day.

Building public understanding about the causes of skin cancer and self protection methods is an important public health education challenge.

The need for adopting sun protection habits was highlighted in a recent study conducted by the American School Health Association. Only 14% of high school students reported routine use of sunscreen or sunblock with an SPF of 15 or higher when outside for more than an hour on a sunny day.

Regarding sources of UV Index information, two-thirds of the respondents in the UV Index survey indicated they would rely on the general consumer media for daily information for UV index levels.

Readers can get their UV index prediction for their area by logging on to www.sunsafetyalliance.org and entering their zip code for local UV index predictions.

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The Sun Safety Alliance™ (SSA) is a 501c3 non-profit educational organization dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of sun safe practices to prevent skin cancer via a variety of educational programs, including the Mothers and Others Against Skin Cancer grass roots initiative. More information is available at www.sunsafetyalliance.org

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UV Index Scale

The UV Index scale used in the United States conforms with international guidelines for UVI reporting established by the World Health Organization. What follows is a description of each UV Index level.

2 or less: Low
A UV Index reading of 2 or less means low danger from the sun's UV rays for the average person:

- Wear Sunglasses on bright days. In winter, reflection off snow can nearly double UV strength.
- If you burn easily, cover up and use sunscreen.

3 – 5: Moderate
A UV Index reading of 3 to 5 means moderate risk of harm from unprotected sun exposure.

- Take precautions, such as covering up, if you will be outside.
- Stay in shade near midday when the sun is strongest.

6 – 7: High
A UV Index reading of 6 to 7 means high risk of harm from unprotected sun exposure. Apply a sunscreen with a SPF of at least 15. Wear a wide-brim hat and sunglasses to protect your eyes.

- Protection against sunburn is needed.
- Reduce time in the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Cover up, wear a hat and sunglasses, and use sunscreen.

8 - 10: Very High
A UV Index reading of 8 to 10 means very high risk of harm from unprotected sun exposure. Minimize sun exposure during midday hours, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Protect yourself by liberally applying a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15. Wear protective clothing and sunglasses to protect the eyes.

- Take extra precautions. Unprotected skin will be damaged and can burn quickly.
- Minimize sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Otherwise, seek shade, cover up, wear a hat and sunglasses, and use sunscreen.

11+: Extreme
A UV Index reading of 11 or higher means extreme risk of harm from unprotected sun exposure. Try to avoid sun exposure during midday hours, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Apply sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 liberally every 2 hours.

- Take all precautions. Unprotected skin can burn in minutes. Beachgoers should know that white sand and other bright surfaces reflect UV and will increase UV exposure.
- Try to avoid sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Seek shade, cover up, wear a hat and sunglasses, and use sunscreen.

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